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ISSN 0014-0139(199405)32:5:1-L



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ISSN 0014-0139(199405)32:5:1-L

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# Heroic Serbia

FROM THE FRENCH OF  
VICTOR BÉRARD

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## M. VICTOR BÉRARD.

M. VICTOR BÉRARD is one of the ablest and most cultivated French political writers. Born in 1864 and educated at the Ecole Normale Supérieure he rapidly distinguished himself by the brilliance of his intellect and the versatility of his talent. His Hellenic studies stimulated his interest in Near Eastern questions, and after publishing, in 1894, his first important work "*De l'Origine des Cultes Arcadiens*," he produced in rapid succession valuable works upon Turkey and Hellenism, the policy of Sultan Abdul Hamid, Macedonia, and Cretan affairs. In 1900 he published one of the best books yet written on England and British Imperialism, in the preparation of which he had the assistance of the late Mr. Joseph Chamberlain. Returning then to his classical studies he produced an excellent work upon the Phœnicians and the Odyssey, which was followed by a series of volumes on foreign questions, including works on Russia and on "France and William II."

Since the beginning of the war he has devoted himself entirely to spreading in France knowledge of the Allies, and of the allied cause. He has lectured and written constantly upon Serbia and Southern Slav unity, of which he is an ardent supporter. All his writings are marked by profound knowledge and by a vivacity of mind which renders attractive his treatment of even the most arid subjects.

# HEROIC SERBIA

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## I. SERBIA AND ITS HISTORY.

**U**NTIL the year 1912 Serbia was one of the weakest states in Europe and her very existence as a nation was threatened. Though larger than Belgium (11,000 square miles), Holland (12,500 square miles) or even Denmark (15,500), and Switzerland (15,900), Serbia was far more sparsely populated. Its territory was eleven times smaller than that of the United Kingdom and its population fifteen times less; for in an area of 18,600 square miles (the United Kingdom has 121,600) Serbia had only 2,900,000 inhabitants (as against 45,000,000). The whole population of Serbia scarcely equalled that of Paris alone.

Serbia's geographical situation was even less favourable than that of the other small European states. Completely cut off from any sea-board, she lacked those commercial relations and possibilities of expansion which have given to Denmark, Holland and Belgium their good fortune and their security. She was shut in on all sides like Switzerland by land frontiers: powerful states cut

her off from the rest of the world and she had not yet become, like Switzerland, a road and railway centre where the travellers of half Europe meet. Switzerland has been called the shunting pivot of the railway engines and tourists of the West. The Serbia of 1912 remained what she had been for five or six centuries past—the battlefield on which the ambitions and diplomatic intrigues of the East met. Already neighbouring armies were marking it out as the *rendez-vous* for the battles of the morrow.

For five or six centuries Serbia had never known complete independence. During the close of the Middle Ages, before the arrival of the Turks in Europe, she had been a great and prosperous state stretching from the Save to the Adriatic. Peopled entirely by Jugoslavs (Southern Slavs), she was Christian and highly civilised. Thanks to her Adriatic ports, where the fleets of Venice touched, she could preserve contact with the West and especially with the Latin nations. She had intimate relations with the Italian cities and with the Kings of France and Spain. Western influence introduced to her our ideas, fashions and arts, and Serbia still has churches erected by the ancient master-builders and decorated by the fresco painters of the West.

But in the middle of the fourteenth century the Turks of Asia Minor invaded the European provinces of the Byzantine Empire. They advanced by the valley of the Vardar into the



heart of the Serbian lands, to the plain of Kosovo, "the field of the blackbirds." At the battle of Kosovo (1389) Serbian heroism was crushed by superior numbers; the Turks reduced the whole of Serbia, and not long afterwards Hungary, upper and lower, and the whole plain of the middle Danube to within easy distance of Vienna.

For four centuries then (1400-1804) Serbia was massacred and pillaged. A quarter of her population was reduced to serfdom or perished by the sword, another quarter was forcibly converted to Islam, the religion of the Turks and Arabs, and became under the name of Bosniaks a Moslem people which still spoke the language of its ancestors, the same Slav language as the other Serbs, but which was attached by a community of religion to the service of the conquering Turks. A third quarter emigrated to Russia, to Italy and even to Provence, but above all to the "Military Frontiers" of the Habsburg Monarchy. It was the Southern Slav race which during four centuries furnished the House of Austria with those famous Croat regiments which proved its best defenders against invasion from without and rebellion from within.

In what had once been Serbia there only remained two groups of mountaineers, unchangeably attached to the soil and to the faith of their ancestors, the men of the Šumadija (the forests of modern Serbia), and the men of the Black Mountain (Montenegro, as the Latins of the

Adriatic call it, Crna Gora as it is called by the Slavs themselves).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the ideas of the French revolution rekindled the courage and patriotism of this nation of slaves. In 1804 the Serbs were the first Balkan people to rise against the Turks, and followed the French people in its conquest of the Rights of Man. It is interesting to note that Stephen Živković, director of the insurgents' powder magazine at Valjevo, translated into Serb the *Télémaque* of Fénélon. Throughout last century an indomitable courage and patriotism, aided by Russia and France, won first autonomy and then independence for the two groups of Serbs which had always remained Christian and recalcitrant in the Šumadija and in Montenegro. Piece by piece the remnants of their ancestral territory was delivered and divided between the two Serbian States, which became the Principalities and eventually the Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro, with their two capitals in Belgrade and Cetinje.

In 1912 Serbia and Montenegro were still separated from each other by the two Turkish provinces of Kosovo and Novibazar. The Serbs were still far from having attained their national resurrection. To the south, and in the centre of the Great Serbia of former days, Turkey still held a million Serbs in subjection, in Macedonia and Kosovo. To the north, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Slavonia, in the Banat of Temesvár, in Croatia and

in Dalmatia, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had for two centuries taken the place of the Turks, whom the arms of loyal Croats and Serbs had expelled from these dependencies of Hungary. Austria persisted in subjecting to its bureaucracy and police as the victims of intolerance and exploitation, five or six million of these Jugoslavs, who speak one and the same language but practise three religions. The Croats of Croatia and Dalmatia are Roman Catholics, the Serbs are Orthodox, while a considerable section of the inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina are Mohammedans. But all these peoples in Austria-Hungary belong to the same branch, the Serbo-Croat, of the Yugoslav race; all speak an identical language and are one in outlook in the present as in the past.

The imperial and royal dynasty of Austria-Hungary, the House of Habsburg, which held by right of conquest the countries of Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, had the design, publicly avowed, of adding to them sooner or later the two independent Serbian states, Serbia and Montenegro, with the object of creating a single Serbo-Croat Kingdom, to be annexed to its other kingdoms of Hungary, Bohemia, Poland and Austria.

The Habsburg dynasty regarded the conquest as legitimate because the annexation of the two Serbian kingdoms seemed to it necessary if the Monarchy was to endure. This Monarchy has never known such a thing as national unity, it

includes seven or eight subject nations under two ruling peoples, the German and the Magyar, with two capitals, Vienna and Budapest, the one German and the other Magyar. It owes its survival to a balance maintained with difficulty between these two peoples and states which are not so much friends as rivals. It has repeatedly been found necessary to negotiate an agreement or "compromise" as it is called, between the two cabinets of Vienna and Budapest, between the two governments of this "Dualist" regime. Thus the future of the dynasty was precarious. The Heir Apparent, Francis Ferdinand, who expected to become Emperor upon the death of the aged Francis Joseph (born in 1830), had the idea of substituting for this Dual system a project of "Trialism," more firmly planted on the triple base of the three kingdoms which would be obtained by annexing all the Yugoslav peoples and thus adding a Serbo-Croat kingdom of Agram or of Belgrade to the Austrian kingdom of Vienna and the Hungarian kingdom of Budapest.

Since the year 1906 the official journalists of Vienna saw but a single alternative for the future of the Yugoslav race. Either all the Southern Slavs, forcibly annexed to the Habsburg Monarchy, would become the subjects of the Germans of Vienna or of the Magyars of Budapest or, left free to make their own choice, the people of Croatia, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina would sooner or later unite with the Serbs of Belgrade and



Cetinje to make a single independent kingdom, a national and democratic state of Serbia, just as formerly Neapolitans, Romans, Tuscans, Venetians Lombards and Piedmontese had united to make a national kingdom of Italy.

Since 1906, but above all since 1909, Austria was only looking for an opportunity or a pretext for throwing her millions of soldiers against the two little Serbian states. She counted upon easily invading and annexing the kingdom of Belgrade, and then encircling and reducing by hunger the kingdom of Cetinje. Every year from 1909 to 1914 the government of Vienna found some perfidious complaint to raise against the Serbs; it mobilised against them, threatened to make war, but recoiled at the last moment before the diplomatic intervention of the Triple Entente. In 1914 the renewed menace ended in war. The great Serbian victories of 1912-1914 kindled the enthusiasm of all the Jugoslavs and turned the heart of every Serb and Croat towards Belgrade. Austria thought that she could no longer give way.

## II. THE THREE WARS.

From 1912 to 1916 the Serbs have had to endure three great wars :

- (1) The war against the Turks, 1912.
- (2) The war against Bulgaria, 1913.
- (3) The war against Austria-Hungary,  
Germany and Bulgaria, 1914-1915.

(1) *The war against the Turks.*—In September,

1912, the Turks still held in Europe the provinces of Albania, Macedonia and Roumelia, that is to say the whole centre of the Balkan Peninsula between the Adriatic and the Black Sea. These Ottoman provinces were inhabited by a Christian majority—Bulgars, Serbs, Greeks and Vlachs—and a Moslem minority of Albanians and Turks. They had always been very badly administered. Since 1894 they were a prey to anarchy and insurrection as the result of administrative pillage and of the theocratic *regime* of the Turks. On paper the Turkish administration was organised on European lines, but the officials never being paid, they resorted to every kind of theft in order to live. As the phrase goes in that part of the world, they “ate,” and the appetite of these “eaters” was insatiable. As the generals and officers stole the pay, food, and clothing of the troops, so soldiers and gendarmes plundered in the towns and on the high roads. As the prefects did not pay the salaries in their offices, the officials under them demanded money from the public for the simplest documents, and nothing was possible in Turkey without innumerable documents. Even to travel in the interior a passport was needed.

Above all the Christian peasantry were the prey of the tax collector. The tenth part of the harvest was due to the government, and the government farmed out this tax to middlemen, who extorted from the peasants a fifth and even a

quarter of his crop. Besides this the peasant was molested, robbed, beaten and often killed by the Mussulman chiefs who arrogated to themselves all seignorial rights and treated the Christians as subject to imposts and corvées. The Albanian chiefs, above all the Begs of the plain of Kosovo, employed methods, one of which has remained famous under the name of Tash-parassi, the "tooth-penny." Every spring and every autumn an Albanian Beg installed himself with his band in one of the villages of Kosovo. They led a jolly life, emptied the hay loft, the cellar and the farm-yard and on leaving extracted from the ruined peasant the "tooth-penny" to pay for the wear and tear of their lordly jaws during this pleasant week.

For fourteen years (1894-1908) it had been possible to lay the responsibility for these excesses upon the Sultan himself, who is at the same time the supreme pontiff of Islam, the Mussulman Pope or Caliph. At that time the Sultan-Caliph of Constantinople was Abdul Hamid, who affected extreme religious fanaticism. By his massacre of Armenians he had earned the name of the "Red Sultan," in Macedonia he continued his Armenian exploits and he alone was believed to be responsible. But when in the month of June, 1908 the outbreak of the Young Turkish revolution had changed the political facade of the Ottoman Empire, and when the *coup d'état* of August, 1909 had replaced the tyranny of Abdul Hamid by that of the Committee

of Union and Progress, it was remarked that the fate of the Christians in European Turkey was in no way improved. On the contrary the Young Turks, while calling themselves patriots and liberals, were in reality fanatical imperialists, and in order to earn pardon for their revolution against the supreme Pontiff of Islam, they affected the same religious zeal as Abdul Hamid and an even greater hatred of the Christians.

They dreamt of driving all the Macedonian Christians from their native soil, and they wished to replace them by Mussulman emigrants, whom they summoned from the provinces recently annexed by Austria-Hungary and Russia. Under the pressure of these emigrants, stripped of everything and subject to pillage, the Christians of Macedonia and Roumelia saw themselves forced to fly by thousands and take refuge in the neighbouring kingdoms with their blood brothers in Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece.

The arrival of these unhappy victims made life very difficult for the government and peoples of these kingdoms. The spectacle of such distress kindled popular anger. The maintenance of thousands of famished people involved great expense upon individuals and upon the states, while the subjects of these neighbouring states were themselves persecuted and plundered in Turkey by the Young Turkish administration, which showed the same police tendencies and the same appetite as that of Abdul Hamid,



Moreover during the summer of 1912, profiting by the Turco-Italian war in Tripoli, Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Greece demanded under a threat of hostilities that Turkey should become a tolerable home for all her subjects, and that the Christians of Macedonia and Roumelia should be assured of a minimum of personal security, and of regular laws and administration, and that, so far as is possible in Turkish countries, massacre and pillage should be punished. The advice of Germany and her ambassador at Constantinople decided the Young Turks to reject all the demands of the Balkan States. The Turco-Balkan war broke out in October, 1912. While the Bulgarians marched on Adrianople and Constantinople, gained the bloody victories of Kirk-Kilisse and Lule-Burgas and advanced right up to the lines of Tchatalja, within a few short miles of the Bosphorus; while the Greeks in Macedonia and Southern Albania won the victories which led them to Salonica and Janina; the Serbs of Belgrade returned as victors to that plain of Kosovo whose sad memory had been so long celebrated by their national songs.

The lofty plain of Kosovo is a sort of fertile oasis in a framework of mountains. In places the ground is studded with masses of light quartz resembling in shape broken fragments of bread. The Serbian legend pretends that these are the last provisions of the Christian combatants in 1389, miraculously turned to stone when the Turks were

about to devour them. Ever since 1389 all Serbia awaited the day when they would take their revenge by driving the Turks from the plain, and would return to eat the "bread of Kosovo."

For three centuries the Christian villages of Kosovo were decimated by the Albanian Begs and forcibly converted to Islam, and especially during the last fifty years the number of Christians in the area of cultivation has steadily decreased. In order not to be massacred, these unhappy people had to renounce their national costume and mother tongue, to assume Albanian dress and to speak Albanian in public. When the troops of victorious Serbia returned in November, 1912, to this country of their ancestors, they were greeted by the last bands of these unhappy victims, who, clothed in Albanian rags but speaking the purest Serb, wept as they kissed their hands. "Brothers," said an old man who led one of these bands, "Brothers, it was high time that you came. We had waited 500 years for you, but in a few years more you would have found no one left."

Then descending from Kosovo the Serbs, still victorious, destroyed the Turkish army of Macedonia at the three great battles of Kumanovo, Prilep and Monastir. Along the borders of the lovely lakes of Prespa and Ochrida and through many mountain gorges they crossed Albania to aid their brothers of Cetinje who, from the heights of the Black Mountain, had thrown themselves upon the Albanians, but for lack of artillery could not

reduce the strong fortress of Scutari. After five centuries (1389-1912) the Serbs reappeared on the Adriatic coast, at the ports of Durazzo and San Giovanni di Medua, which restored them to intimacy with the West. After five centuries the Serbs once more occupied the whole south of their national territory between the Vardar and the Adriatic. They had recovered that Macedonian district of Ochrida and that Adriatic plain of Alessio, which had been, with Kosovo, the best provinces in ancient Serbia. After five centuries they recovered the free sea and across the Adriatic were once more in a position to enter into commercial and friendly relations with the West, to return to the schools of Italy and France, and to become throughout the Jugoslav world the propagators of Western ideas and democratic manners.

Henceforth the Turks and their military theocracy were ejected from almost all their conquests in Europe. All that was left to them was Constantinople and a narrow slip of territory along the Dardanelles and Bosphorus. The victory of the Balkan Allies was the triumph of modern ideas, of democratic patriotism, and it also appeared to be the dawn of an era of peace and civilisation in the Balkan world. This triumph of the small nations rid the Peninsula of its oppressors and partitioned it among the states who had delivered it.

(2) *The Serbo-Bulgarian War.*—But Austria, which could only survive at the expense of these nationalities and through their subjection to its

imperialism, embroiled matters between the Balkan Allies. In 1913 a new war broke out. Greece and Serbia united had to meet the onslaught of Bulgaria; Bulgaria in her turn was attacked by the Turks and the Roumanians. The Bulgarians were punished for their aggression when the Greeks defeated a Bulgarian army at Kukush. The Serbs on the lines of the Bregalnitzza made a heroic stand against the furious onslaught of another Bulgarian army, and won the victories of Zletovo, Kočana, Istip and Krivolak, June-July, 1913.

Peace was only restored by the harsh Treaty of Bucarest which robbed the Bulgarians of the greater part of their recent conquests in Roumelia and Macedonia. Serbia remained in possession of her inland acquisitions, of the plains of Kosovo, Skoplje and Monastir; of the valleys of the Drin and the Vardar. But this second war, despite its victories and annexation, cost the Serbs almost as dear as the Bulgars. Austrian threats forced the government of Belgrade to renounce the Adriatic coast and hinterland and free access to the sea; Montenegro had to give up Scutari, Serbia Durazzo and Medua, to the new Albanian state which Austria insisted upon creating against the Serbs. After these two years of heroic warfare, Serbia, aggrandised but still landlocked, still remained an inland state subjected to the menace and economic exploitation of Austria-Hungary.

This menace continued to weigh upon Serbia and its capital Belgrade, which was only protected



against invasion by the waters of the Save and the Danube. Belgrade was always at the mercy of a bombardment or a sudden assault. Belgrade at the junction of the Save and the Danube occupied a site very similar to that of Lyon during the Roman epoch: Lyon was at that time planted on the high hill of Fourvières, washed by the junction of the Rhône and the Saone. From the height of its hill which dominates the junction of the Save and the Danube, Belgrade looks far out across the great Danubian plain which stretches out flat and marshy to that hill, 180 miles away, from which the old Hungarian fortress of Buda looks out upon Pest. Hungarian territory begins where these two rivers join, at Semlin, whose cannon, with the batteries of Austro-Hungarian monitors, command Belgrade and the river.

The Austro-Hungarian customs weigh still more heavily upon the whole economic life of the Serbs. In order to starve Serbia and force her to surrender, Austria-Hungary had no need to make a "war of men"; a "war of pigs" seemed to her sufficient. Serbia exports a very large number of these animals; it is the sale of these pigs abroad which forms the chief item in her revenue, but virtually her only way of exporting them was through Austria-Hungary, and the Austro-Hungarian market was her best client. It was sufficient for the latter under pretext of some contagious malady, to close the Semlin customs house to Serbian imports, and the pig war already raging,

and the Serbian people and state were deprived of their principal commerce.

(3) *The Austro-Serbian War*.—Even curtailed by the creation of an Albanian state and threatened and ruined by the policy of Austria, the Serbia of 1913, national and victorious, independent and parliamentary, tolerant and democratic, remained a bugbear for a feudal and inquisitorial state like Austria-Hungary. The Southern Slavs, always oppressed by the Habsburg Monarchy as their brothers and cousins of Macedonia had been by the Ottoman Empire, applauded the victory of the Serbs. That just revenge for Kosovo which all had awaited for five centuries, seemed to them the first step in their complete and final deliverance, in the resurrection of the entire race.


Serbia, victorious and exhausted, only dreamt of peace and repose. She had lost men by tens of thousands; she had missed her harvest in 1913 (and this peasant people draws its whole revenue from the soil); she had expended millions in armaments and military outlay; she needed ten or fifteen years of peace to restore her people, her army and her finances and to organise and assimilate her recent acquisitions. But Austria was resolved to profit by this exhaustion to realise the "great design" which one of her military journals, *Danzers Armeezeitung*, had publicly put forward since the year 1906. This semi-official organ demanded the occupation by the Austrian

army of the Serbian towns and fortresses of Belgrade and Niš. It regarded the annexation of Serbia to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as necessary in order to re-open to the House of Habsburg the route of the Vardar, the conquest of Macedonia and of Salonica, the *Drang nach Osten und nach Süden* to which Vienna had aspired for three centuries. The financiers of Vienna agreed with the soldiers, that Serbia must be annexed in order to make of Salonica an Austro-German port and place the Levantine Mediterranean under German control.

In the month of May, 1914, the German Emperor, William II., and the Austro-Hungarian Heir Apparent, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, met at Konopisht and drew up the plan for the operations which was regarded by the Austrian and German generals as capable of easy and rapid execution and as indispensable. The Albanian kingdom artificially erected in 1913 could scarcely be kept alive, and the German Prince William of Wied, who had been installed as Mpret (king), was insulted by his unruly subjects. Would Serbia and Montenegro then recover Scutari and Durazzo, of which Austrian diplomacy had robbed them in 1913?

The Albanians for five or six centuries past have had a peculiar conception of the state. Other peoples differ in their opinion as to the best form of government; some remain faithful to monarchy, others prefer a republic, but all consider

that the first duty of a subject or a citizen is to pay taxes to the state and to contribute to its support. The Albanians alone considered that the state ought to pay all its subjects or citizens and ask of them nothing save military service.

From the spring of 1914, a few months after the installation of the Albanian kingdom, revolution seemed inevitable and might have furnished to the Austrians a pretext for invading the new Serbian provinces, in the guise of a temporary passage, while restoring order in Albania. In June, 1914, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, once in agreement with William II., went to Bosnia to supervise on the Serbian frontier the completion of the Austrian preparations and to announce to the troops that in the near future the Serbs would have to count upon their prowess. A fanatic of the name of Princip assassinated him in Sarajevo.  Princip was of Serb nationality but an Austrian subject; he was not a Serb of Serbia or of Montenegro, but a Herzegovinian born in Austro-Hungarian territory of Orthodox parents. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the Orthodox Christians have always been affronted and even persecuted by the Austrian bureaucracy, because they are of the same religion as the Serbs of Belgrade and Cetinje, and because Austria would have liked to convert them to Catholicism in order to place them willy nilly under the supremacy of her clergy. In all the Southern Slav provinces of Austria-Hungary the Catholic is favoured, the Mussulman protected,



but the Orthodox oppressed. The Herzegovinians as near neighbours of Montenegro were even more harshly treated than the others. Hence they detested Austria and only dreamt of deliverance, as the Italians of Lombardy and Venetia in the days of Silvio Pellico. Princip was the incarnation of all the rancour and hatred of all Herzegovinians against the abuses of Austro-Hungarian administration. He shared the hopes of all Serbo-Croats for speedy liberation, and like them dreamt of national unity. Princip had been expelled from the gymnasium at Sarajevo and had seen a number of his comrades at Mostar insulted by officers of the Austrian garrison.

As early as 1908 a Serbo-Croat agitation had broken out in the Hungarian province of Croatia, and the government of Vienna had accused Serbia of fomenting revolution in its territory. The celebrated Agram trial had been instigated and brought to a conclusion on Austro-Hungarian soil and had proved that Serbia had had no share whatever in these affairs. In 1909 a new attempt was made. A Viennese historian, Dr. Friedjung, had published documents which he regarded as proving a secret accord of the Serbo-Croat agitators with Serbia. At the instance of the Croat deputies a new trial, the Friedjung trial, opened in Vienna itself. At it the documents produced were proved to be forgeries, and these forgeries were proved to be the work of the Austro-Hungarian Minister at Belgrade, Count Forgách; finally in open court

Dr. Friedjung admitted his error and declared that these false documents had come to him from the very highest quarter.

In 1914 came the third attempt. The author of these forgeries, Count Forgách, had become Under Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign affairs at Vienna. No sooner had the murder of the Archduke become known, than the Viennese press accused the government of Belgrade of being its instigator; for a whole month the official journals of the whole Monarchy repeated this accusation without giving the slightest proof.

After this campaign of calumny at the end of July, 1914, the government of Vienna sent an ultimatum to Serbia. Under threat of war, it demanded that the military and civil authorities of Austria-Hungary should have the right to enter Serbia to pursue their enquiries and bring to book the guilty, whom however they did not designate by name. In a veiled form this was the assertion of Austrian control over the government of Belgrade, the subjection of Serbia to the officials and to the armies of Vienna, in short the first stage of annexation.

Despite the two wars which had so recently exhausted and ruined her, Serbia preferred a third war to this dishonouring subjection. But as in 1909-1913, Russia, France and Britain interposed and sought to negotiate an acceptable agreement between Vienna and Belgrade. Austria again seemed on the point of yielding to the just

remonstrances of all civilised peoples, and was offering new conditions, when the Emperor William II. brusquely declared war on Russia, in order, he said, to defend his Austrian ally, who, on that very day, had given her complete adherence to the Russian proposals. It is thus that Austria was driven by Germany into this war, in which the Triple Entente has intervened to defend the right of all independent peoples against the bad faith of the two Central Empires.

On 29 July, 1914, the Austrians opened hostilities by bombarding the open town of Belgrade. Belgrade, being exposed to the batteries and flotillas of Austria, had been abandoned by the Serbian government, which had withdrawn to the centre of the country at Niš. At first Belgrade was only defended by a regiment of the third Ban (Territorial reserve); for 127 days (Aug.-Dec., 1914) the Austrians bombarded the town at intervals, but only made their entrance on 2 December, to be driven out very soon afterwards.

During this period the Austrians had twice invaded Serbia from the West. In the month of August an army of 200,000 men coming from Bosnia crossed the Drina, but was held up on the slopes of Mount Tser in the valley of the Jadar, where it was routed by 100,000 Serbs after four days of bayonet attacks (15-19 Aug.). In October a new Austro-Hungarian army of 250,000 men again crossed the Drina. On a frontier of 100

miles the Serbs held themselves entrenched for over six weeks ; but at the end of November the rains forced them to evacuate the centre, their ammunition began to run short and it was found necessary to withdraw into the interior as far as the slopes of Rudnik. The reinforced Austrians hurried their pace, thinking that they already had their hands upon Kragujevac, Serbia's only arsenal, and Niš, the temporary seat of government. Meanwhile the other army occupied Belgrade. But when the ammunition arrived from France, the Serbs assumed the offensive once more, and from 3 to 7 December they flung back these 300,000 Austrians beyond the Drina and the Save, driving them from Belgrade at the same time. By 14 December the whole of Serbia had been freed from the invader, and an immense booty of rifles, cannon, ammunition and stores, with 60,000 prisoners, remained in Serbian hands. The Austrian assaults upon the other little kingdom of Montenegro had not been more successful. Thus two little peoples which together count less than 5,000,000 inhabitants, had put to flight the armies of an Empire of 50,000,000.

## III. THE SERBIAN PEOPLE.

If these two little kingdoms have been able to hold in check the Dual Monarchy with its 50,000,000 inhabitants, it is because they have been armed from French munition factories and aided by the Triple Entente. During the three wars which Serbia has had to wage, her principal arm has been the French cannon, and it is the French 75 and the officers with French training to whom the victories of Kumanovo and Monastir, of Zadar and Rudnik are due.

*Francuzi su s nama* (the French are with us), the Serbian soldiers exclaim joyously when they hear the sound of the 75, for out there the 75 is called the Frenchman, and is credited with all the qualities usually ascribed to the men of France. The 75 is always gay and always ready, he is agile and of an accomplished and obliging humour, and you very soon get to know and love him. At the first great battle of 1912—at Kumanovo—the French 75 served by the Serbs was faced by Krupp cannon served by the Turks. This first duel enabled one to judge the worth of the two adversaries. The Serbian batteries reduced the Krupp cannon to silence and next day when the Serbian troops occupied the enemy's position, they found that all the Turkish officers and men alike without flinching had bravely fallen by their guns. They had been overwhelmed by the rapid avalanche



of Creusot shells. The "Frenchman" had been twice as quick as the "Schvaba" (this is the Serbian name for the German "Swabians"). The Turkish officers had found it so difficult to serve their German guns, that some of the dead were found with the little Krupp artillery manuals still grasped in their stiffened fingers. The "Schvaba" is a very learned cannon but only useful to men of science and training, while the "Frenchman" is a very logical and simple cannon who from the first makes himself understood by every sensible man. With her cannon France had given to the Serbs the pupils of her University. At the battle of Tser there fell heroically Lieutenant Garašanin, former pupil of the Lycée Janson-de-Sailly, son of that Serbian Minister in France who fought in the ranks of the French army in 1870.

But if French armaments won such victories, it is because they have been placed in the hands of a people who is fully conscious of its national rights and duties, is accustomed to collaborate and has a profound sense of democratic solidarity, an intimate knowledge of the sufferings and exploits of its ancestors—a knowledge spread throughout all classes for many generations, and taught in every hamlet by the poets and singers of its national songs. The Serbian people conquered by its patriotism, its democratic manners and its popular poetry. Nine-tenths of the Serbian nation consists of peasants owning the soil; it is a nation of small proprietors who live upon their crops and

their vines, their flocks and their fruit trees, which they cultivate with their own hands. Every Serb was well aware that in opposing the invaders he was defending his own fields and the daily bread of himself and his family. This war of independence was for him a struggle for life. He knew what fearful exploitation Turkish tyranny had imposed upon his fathers and the rapacity which Austrian tyranny still imposes upon the Yugoslav peoples. With one heart the whole nation flung itself upon the invader—all for one and one for all; from the old men to the children, from the King to the last shepherd, all took to arms.

On 2 November, 1914, the following notice could be read in the Serbian press :

“Crown Prince Alexander has just signed, on the proposition of the Minister of War, the promotion to the rank of corporal Dragoljub Zelic, aged twelve years. This boy's father was killed at the battle of Kumanovo in November, 1912. Being a pupil of the 6th class in the gymnasium of Šabac and not being able to enter the regular army, Dragoljub joined a corps of volunteers and took part with them in seven fights against the Austrians. Wounded at the battle of Suva, he refused to leave the firing line and continued to fire until he was exhausted. In a night attack he penetrated with several comrades into the Austrian lines, and the success of this adventure secured him a military medal.”

At the battle of Rudnik the old King Peter, aged 71 and a martyr to rheumatism, seated himself among the combatants and addressed them in the second person like a father or a big brother, and himself took a rifle like one of the French generals of the revolutionary era. As a former pupil of St. Cyr and an officer of the French army during the war of 1870, he set the example to his citizen army, just as French citizen-generals to-day set the example to the French nation under arms.

Dušan Nikolić was twenty when the war of 1914 broke out. He was the son of the former Serbian Minister at Paris, Andrew Nikolić, who had become President of the Chamber at Belgrade. He had made his first studies at the Lycée Janson-de-Sailly and was a student of law. Called to the colours with the class of 1914 he soon got his stripes, owing to his sporting qualities (he had been one of the founders of sport in Serbia). At the front where he was sent, his colonel was very careful of this young class of 1914, which he wanted to harden gradually before exposing it too much. Besides Mr. Nikolić had already lost four children of croup on the same day. But Dušan Nikolić demanded the most perilous missions: "I am the son of the President of the Chamber," he said one evening, in giving in his report, "I ought to go before all the others." His colonel sent him. The first day Dušan returned with very valuable information, the second day he was missing, and a week after, when the Serbian army expelled the

Austrians from the conquered territory, they found the body of Dušan Nikolić, former pupil of the Lycée St. Janson-de-Sailly.

The following is a mourning announcement in the official journal *Srpske Novine* :

Slobodan P. Jovanović.

Sub-Lieutenant of Infantry, commanding the 3rd Company, 4th Battalion, 1st regiment of the Morava division, wounded 30th November before Belgrade, died 18th December, 1914, buried in the churchyard of Mali-Požarevac.

“My son! I saved thee seven times from illness and from death. I saved thee, I brought thee up to thy nineteenth year, to see thee my first born give thy life for thy country. Thou wast hardworking, intelligent, loyal. When thy comrades found time to return to house and family, thou didst remain at the front because thou couldst not, and wouldst not neglect thy work. Thy masters, comrades and officers preserve thy memory. If thy father had lived he would have been too old to take his place in this Holy War. Thou hast replaced him and hast done thy duty, thou hast given thy life to deliver our hearths and our country which has suffered so terribly. Thy young brother, thy mother and thy three sisters weep for thee. But thou hast found again thy father and thy colonel Milutin Petrović, who was killed beside thee. We know that thou hast died as an intrepid hero for the salvation of Serbia, We pray God to recompense thee. May thy ancestral soil which has suffered so much rest lightly on thee. Thy unhappy mother Vasilja.”

The Victory of the Serbs is the triumph of a free and conscientious nation. It is the victory of the Greeks at Marathon, at Salamis and at

Plataea; it is the victory of the Swiss at Morgarten; it is the victory of the French at Valmy.

The Serbs have a life of "fraternity"; the family, the commune, the nation, the race, have a sense of fraternity which is not to be traced in the same degree in any of the neighbouring peoples. The peasant family is ordinarily grouped in Zadrugas, for permanent association of property and work, under the authority of the eldest or most able member. The property is not partitioned up; the lands, flocks and houses are held in common; all the children are educated together, and all live in one big menage round the same court in different apartments.

The Zadrugas are united by the same solidarity. On the day fixed for the harvest or the vintage, in this or that field or vine-yard, all work without remuneration for the Zadruga, which provides food and drink for its voluntary workers. A beginning is made with fields which have lost their men and are cultivated by widows or orphans. The commune is an hereditary association of Zadrugas, where all common interests are freely discussed and dealt with under the influence of the most respectable and capable.

But the sentiment of national unity and racial affinity dominates this particularist life. In every Serbian hamlet children are taught that not only the "brothers" make up the Zadrugas, the kingdom, the country, but that beyond the existing frontier they hold the sister countries and kingdoms of



Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, etc. One of the proverbs of this Serbian race, divided between three religions, Orthodox, Catholic and Mussulman—a saying known to all and repeated in Serbia as in Bosnia, in Croatia as in Montenegro—is “*Brat je mio, Koje vjere vio*” (He is my brother, whatever his religion may be).

After the battle of Kumanovo, November, 1912, they brought back to the village of Radljevo the body of a young officer, the son of the priest (the Orthodox popes are, and must be married). When the father had officiated with the popes of the neighbourhood, he said to the villagers: “Now brothers, let us bear him to the cemetery.” But from the crowd of women, children and old men who surrounded the coffin, the old mayor advanced and said: “What cemetery, most reverend father? The cemetery is for the old and the women who have done nothing for the country. Him we will inter here before the church, that he may serve as an example to all our children, that is the desire of all our people.” The pope refused, because the law forbids burials round the churches. “Never mind, go on,” said the mayor, “we will go to the King, to the Chamber; you will not be troubled.” The pope yielded. They dug the grave in front of the church and placed in it the coffin with the uniform and the sabre of the deceased man. But the pope, taking back the sabre, gave it to his little son of twelve, with the words: “Alexa, my son, take and keep this precious gift. Serbia will still

have need of it, and after Serbia we shall have millions of brothers to liberate, when the country calls you to the service of the race."

After the battle of Rudnik in December, 1914, the old King Peter was visiting the field ambulance. They led him up to a dying man who had a bad wound in the head. He looked up and recognised the King. "Where are we, gospodar (sire)?" he asked. "We have beaten the Austrians and retaken Valjevo." The man raised himself and cried "Long live the King, Long live the nation." Then he asked for his uniform, pulled out of it his pocket book and gave it to the King. "It is for the army," he said, and died. The pocket book contained 700 dinars (£28), all the savings of this well-to-do peasant.

In mid-winter of 1912-1913, the Serbian troops at last reached the Adriatic coast at Durazzo, after two weeks of forced marching in the snow and icy water of the Albanian highlands. On the last heights when the sea came in sight an immense joy overcame them all. They all understood that in the history of the race and nation, it was a memorable day. The gates of deliverance and civilisation were open once more, and the last of those peasants thought of the free future of his regenerated country and felt that the Serbian people was getting back its "lungs." They ran towards Durazzo; before entering the town the ranks were reformed and the troops marched to the water's edge in admirable order. The Serbian

flag was planted in the sea amid cries of *Živelo srpsko more* (long live the Serbian sea). That evening at the field ambulance the doctors dealt with the cases of 147 men who had frostbitten feet, but who, carried or supported by their comrades, had reached the Serbian sea, and had insisted upon marching to the shore like the others.

It is these democratic habits, this national solidarity, which have made it possible for the non-combatants to till the fields and gather in the harvest during these four years of almost continual war. All able-bodied men were at the front, fighting for all; the whole population of women, children and old men were in the fields, cultivating for all. The families of the wounded and killed were helped in their work, succoured in their distress and grief, fed in their need by the "brothers" of the Zadrugas or the villages. The whole nation being but a single family shared in common its resources, and its invincible hope.

Thus gradually among the Serbs the heritage of a distant past has always been maintained by a national popular literature of which the ancient Greeks alone, or at a later date the French, had an equivalent. The poets and singers of *Pesmes* have during four centuries, from the defeat of Kosovo in 1389 to the insurrection of 1804, been the true defenders of the independence of the Serbian race and language. When the whole race lay crushed under the double tyranny of Turkey and Austria, the singers and poets celebrated

everywhere the memory of their ancestors, their exploits and defeats. Kosovo! Kosovo! for five centuries Serbia has re-echoed to this name of sorrow as medieval France to the name of Roncevaux. But at Roncevaux the French Roland had fallen. At Kosovo, in spite of the defeat, the Serbian Roland, Marko Kraljević, had miraculously escaped; he was living always, merely fallen asleep in his mountain grotto, whence his invincible aid would return to his people on the great day of "Kosovo avenged."

On the day of "Kosovo avenged," in 1912, in 1913, in 1914, Marko Kraljević fought in real truth in the ranks of his people. Along the whole front, in all the battles, the popular singers, the guslars, who accompany on a one-stringed fiddle, recited the virtues of Marko, and held up as an example his incomparable bravery, his indomitable strength, his hatred of tyranny and oppression, his love of the weak and his eternal victory over the "three-headed Arab." As ancient Greece had in its Achilles, medieval France in its Roland and modern France in its Jeanne D'Arc, its Bayard, its Hoche and Marceau, the ideal and type of their national virtues, so it is Marko Kraljević who incarnates and maintains the devotion of the Serbs to their past, their race and their national duties.

In 1912 the first Serbian troops crossed the Turkish frontier. They arrived in torrents of rain in a muddy plain furrowed by torrents. They had

to remain in the water ; their convoy had not been able to follow them, and the wind brought down the tents. It was a night of hunger and suffering, a night too of anxiety. For the Turks were known to have their railway station only a few miles off and were receiving reinforcements and provisions from Mitrovitza. When dawn came, there became visible on a distant hillock the mosque where once the Sultan Murad, the conqueror of the Serbs, had been interred. One word ran through the army : Kosovo ! they had reached Kosovo ! In one minute the whole front was dancing and singing, and the march was resumed, as though they had slept and eaten. At the station of Mitrovitza, evacuated by the Turks, they found eight truck-loads of biscuits, and the Serbian officers merely had to distribute to the troops the " bread of Kosovo."

In Macedonia after the hard field of Kumanovo another battle had lasted all day before the town of Prilep, the historic home of Marko Karljević. The Turks, strongly entrenched, had repelled four assaults ; the Serbians were exhausted and began to give ground. A ray of sunshine suddenly illuminated the old tower of Marko above the river. An officer started one of the Pesmes which celebrated the hero's exploits. " Forward " and Marko himself led the avengers. By evening Prilep was in Serbian hands.

Ljuba Kovačević, the former minister, is a well-known Serbian historian. He had five



daughters and a son, Vladeta Kovačević, former student of the University of Paris. At the battle of Kumanovo, where he commanded the Mitrail-leuses, Vladeta was killed. His body was brought back to Belgrade. On the day of the funeral his mother and five sisters wept and groaned aloud. At the grave the old father without a tear made the following speech: "My son, depart in peace. Thou hast done thy duty. My son, I do not weep: I am proud of thee. Thou hast joined the heroes whose sufferings and death of old saved by millions the lives and souls of our nation. Tell the heroes of Kosovo, Dušan and Lazar and all the martyrs of former days, that to-day Kosovo is avenged."





# Heroic Serbia

FROM THE FRENCH OF  
VICTOR BÉRARD

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